

March 14, 2020



Gangster In Our Midst—available at local bookstores, [Amazon](#), [Walmart](#) & [Barnes & Noble](#)

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Gangster Blog

Coronavirus Effect

Please be advised all book events are subject to cancellation due to the coronavirus outbreak. Watch for updates on my author Facebook page and website. **Confirm before you leave home** an event is still happening.

DSM Book Festival, Mar. 28

(CANCELLED) I'm looking forward to my first DSM Book Festival on Sat., Mar. 28th (9 am- 7 pm), Capital Square, 400 Locust St., Des Moines, IA. Find me at the **"Sisters in Crime-IA" booth**.

June Iowa Book Tour (add'l dates to follow)

— **Sat., Jun 6, 1 pm**, "Writing a Memoir" (Author Workshop: We Are Eight), Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA Registration: bremercountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com or (319) 352-1309.

— **Mon., Jun. 8, noon/5:45 pm**, (Author Talk: Gangster in Our Midst), Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA Rotary Club/ Lions Club

Author Workshop: "Writing a Memoir" Feb. 29 (update)

Seven women were in attendance at my first "Writing a Memoir" workshop at the Oakdale Public Library on Feb. 29. Attendees were teachers, bloggers, and others from Cottage Grove, Lake Elmo, and Oakdale, MN. I'm looking forward to the next writing workshop on **Sat., June 6 in Waverly, IA.**

(New) Vendor: Sweet Reads Books and Candy, LLC,
407 North Main St., Austin, MN



'Three Fingers'

COMING!

Sequel to
**Gangster in Our
Midst:**
Summer 2020!

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The Man Who Found a Way to Crossover

Fairbank's iconic Island Park was originally part of the 43.51 acres Albert Clark acquired from the government in 1852 (read more at [Historical Fairbank, Iowa](#)).

The town's old-timers tell the story of the day their forefathers dredged the river in that spot above the dam:

"The island just appeared out of nowhere."

At the turn of the twentieth century a foot bridge was built—supported by pontoons—making the beautiful shaded island accessible for picnics and church activities—even baptismal ceremonies.

That bridge washed out about 1910.

One of Fairbank's adopted sons, Charles Grantham (1892-1962), would eventually remedy the problem—twenty years later.

According to his obituary, Charles was born in Custer, SD. When a small child, he moved with his parents to Livonia, Mo, where he attended school and learned telegraphy. In 1909 he came to Waterloo, and in 1912 he went to Kilgore, Neb where he learned the printing trade, then to Casper, Wyo where he worked for the *Daily Tribune*. In 1917 he was inducted into the U.S. Army and served as a radio operator.

He came to Fairbank in 1921 and became owner-publisher of the town newspaper, *The Four County Advocate/The Fairbank View*, founded in 1886.

He also purchased the Opera House (where he relocated the printing equipment) at First and Main streets. The property came with a projector on the upper floor, and he quickly found a love for showing silent movies and 'talkies'.

Verlie Hahn, age 99—a lifelong resident of the town—said as a young girl she frequently stopped by to find Charles previewing film on the projector to remedy any broken pieces with banana glue.

(cont. P2)



Pontoon bridge. Photo: Howard Durham, Fairbank historian



Charles Grantham standing on cable bridge of his design.
Photo: courtesy *Waterloo Courier*, August 1930

Author Events

(Jan.–Jun, 2020)

Book Festivals

— **(CANCELLED) Sat., Mar. 28, 9 am - 7 pm**, DSM Book Festival, Capital Square, 400 Locust St., Des Moines, IA

Writing Workshops:

— **Sat., Jun 6, 1 pm** — "Writing a Memoir" (Author Workshop: We Are Eight), Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA, 319-352-1309

Author Talks/Book Signings

— **Mon., Jun. 8, noon/5:45 pm**, (Author Talk: Gangster in Our Midst) Rotary Club/Lions Club at Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA
— **Sat., June 20, 1 pm**, (Book Signing: Gangster in Our Midst) Sweet Reads Books and Candy, LLC 407 North Main St., Austin, MN

— **Thurs., July 16th, 6:30pm** — (Author Talk: Gangster in Our Midst) Stuart Public Library, 119 E Front Street, Stuart, IA

...a Way to Crossover (cont.)

The town found out Charles was an entrepreneur of sorts when he came up with a design for a cable foot bridge. The bridge was formally dedicated in August 1930, according to an article in the *Waterloo Courier*.

Truth be told, Charles' cable bridge lasted only four years before it had to be replaced by a sturdier steel one.

At some point, Charles also took on the role of boxing promoter in the area. The new footbridge allowed him to move the matches to the island.

Another local, Howard Durham, said 'back in the day' attendees sat on makeshift benches, rows of planks stretching across cement blocks that encircled a boxing ring made of heavy ropes strung between oil drums.

I imagined one of those amateur fights in the chapter, "Boxing on The Island Park," in my historical novel, *Gangster in Our Midst* (2017), where I pitted one of Doc Buckmaster's twin boys from Dunkerton against a lad from Oran, both nearby communities.

Ladies from the Baptist church set up a bratwurst and Coke stand next to the foot bridge, where they also had opportunity to push missionary speaker pamphlets—probably printed by Charles.

In 1935 Charles married Dorthea Bethel Ellis at the First Baptist Church, where they were members. Both were in their 40s and never had any children.

It wasn't until 1938 that the island and surrounding land was officially deeded to the American Legion, who in turn, deeded it to the town of Fairbank to be used as a park.

In 1941 the town hired the Weldon Brothers to install the most recent walking bridge when they replaced the wooden dam.

The newspaper and Opera House closed after the Wall Street crash of 1929. Charles continued to show his movies on the top floor of the building currently housing the Post Office. He fixed radios and other electronics out of his garage, and occasionally spoke at area churches about his soldiering experience during WWI.

He ran for city council, too. His accusation that council candidate John Rechkemmer had "roughed him up and ripped his suit coat" made the news in an article, "Fairbank Sewer Feud Becomes Hot" (*Oelwein Register*, Nov. 1959).

When Charles Jefferson Grantham died on November 6, 1962, he had been a resident of Fairbank for 41 years. His pallbearers were town leaders: Robert Bentley, James Lyon, Emmet Durham, Gordon Bentley, John Rechkemmer, and Don Steggell.

Years later, he is perhaps best remembered for being the man who found a way for locals to crossover to their beloved Island Park.

And of course, all this was happening after one of Al Capone's gangsters, Louie La Cava, began frequenting the town in the early 1920s.



Charles Grantham. Photo: *Oelwein Register*, Nov. 1959